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ABSTRACT

Teachers have been learning to improve their questioning strategies to facilitate students' thinking. The students too should learn the skill of questioning to be a good reader for the rest of their lives. The teacher's first job is to identify for students the skill of questioning as a way of understanding the writer, pinpointing his purpose, synthesizing what he says, evaluating his ideas, and solving problems. Then he should demonstrate for them how questioning is done. The most important but most problematic step is providing for students the environment to practice the skill of questioning. The ultimate objective is to help students reach the point where they question writers as they read. Since questioning the writer is a somewhat difficult and complex concept, the students should be led to begin by questioning the present that evolves around themselves, then proceed to questioning peers and other persons known to them, and finally to questioning the writer whose ideas can only be reached through the printed words. (AW)

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QUESTIONING STRATEGIES IN READING

OR

IS THE RIGHT PERSON BEING TRAINED

TO ASK THE QUESTIONS?

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Questioning strategies is a popular and powerful phrase in teacher education right now. The improvement of teachers' ability to question has as its objective the improvement of students' thinking. As teachers improve and expand their questioning strategies, the thinking of students is lifted from literal level to other levels in the intellectual hierarchy. The research of Taba, Gagne, Bruner, Piaget, and others on the thinking processes undergirds the necessity for teachers to go beyond fact questions to the kinds of questions that open the way for students to manipulate concepts or ideas.

Probably the goal of education has always been to improve thinking skills, and the present emphasis on teachers' questioning strategies is a coup in teacher-training programs, whether the teachers be reading teachers, science teachers, or vocational arts teachers.

But all this training of teachers still makes school a place where teachers ask the questions and students try to give the right answers. For the most part, learning to improve questioning strategies has been on the part of the teacher. He has been and is learning to ask questions that will facilitate students' thinking.

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But once the student is out of school, who's to ask the questions? Having been nurtured on even the improved questioning of teachers which motivates him to think at deeper levels, will he be able to continue thinking deeply when no one asks him questions, when no one provides the stimulus to which he is supposed to respond? School occupies only from 10 percent to 23 or 24 percent of a person's life. Without anyone to ask him questions for the 70 to 80 percent of his life span, which constitutes adulthood, do the higher thinking processes, that the expert teacher-questioner tried to stimulate, debilitate, grow flabby and weak? Does he become a sponge soaking up what any typewriter-beater turns out? Recall please the recent verbalizations of one of our top government officials. Did he or did he not imply that Americans are unable to sift the output of the news media and to separate wheat from chaff? Does teacher improvement in the skill of questioning make questioners of students? If so, how? By osmosis? By contagion? By imitation? I think not.

Surely the training in questioning strategies stops short if it stops with the teacher. By passing on the expertise of questioning, the how and the why of the skill, students will be let in on the secret too. If the teacher identifies the art of questioning as a learning technique, guides students in its use, and arranges the environment so they can practice it, we might change the school from a place where students are taught to answer to a place where students also learn to question, both as they listen and as they read . . . to question in order to investigate, to reason, to make decision, to solve problems. These are the requisites of homo sapiens, yes?

Do you find it as ironic as I do that we are occupying time and space talking about teaching the skill of questioning, either to the teacher or

to the student? More accurately, we should be using the word reteaching or retraining. Recall, if you will, the questioning techniques of three-year-olds, four-year-olds, five-year-olds. At five their questions are more refined and sophisticated than at three. They are well on their way to being pros. They are walking question marks. What happens to their curiosity, their growing facility to question? How is it that after a few semesters in school, children perceive that to ask a question is to stand nakedly ignorant before the rest of the class, indeed the rest of the world? Were each of us to respond to the question, we would find marked similarities in our answers. Despite our knowing the reason, we educators continue to change questioning preschoolers into question-shy students. School continues to be, with some exceptions, places where students are the answerers and teachers are the questioners, and not very good ones at that sometimes.

This digression to take a look at the status quo leads us back to topic, "Questioning Strategies in Reading" or more appropriately "Is the Right Person Being Trainer - Perhaps Retrained - To Ask Questions?"

As reading teachers, we are committed to helping students transform into adults who will spend the rest of their lives questioning as they read. Having competency in questioning gives readers greater management over the printed word designed to exert influence. Surely then we of all teachers need to train students in the skill of questioning. If there is even one student who doesn't know that he's supposed to question authors, that's 100 percent too many.

Because college students have had twelve or thirteen years of conditioning in becoming answerers instead of questioners, their retraining isn't easy. But we can do it by working on the learning principle that

> When a skill is identified, given guidance and
> provided practice time, growth takes place.

Our first job then is to identify for students the skill of questioning as a way of understanding a writer, as a way of pinpointing his purpose, as a way of synthesizing what a writer says into ideas and concepts, as a way of evaluating an author's ideas, as a way of making judgments, as a way of formulating alternate solutions to problems posed in print. Good readers search among a writer's words to find what he is thinking and/or what he wishes the reader to think. Good readers search with questions.

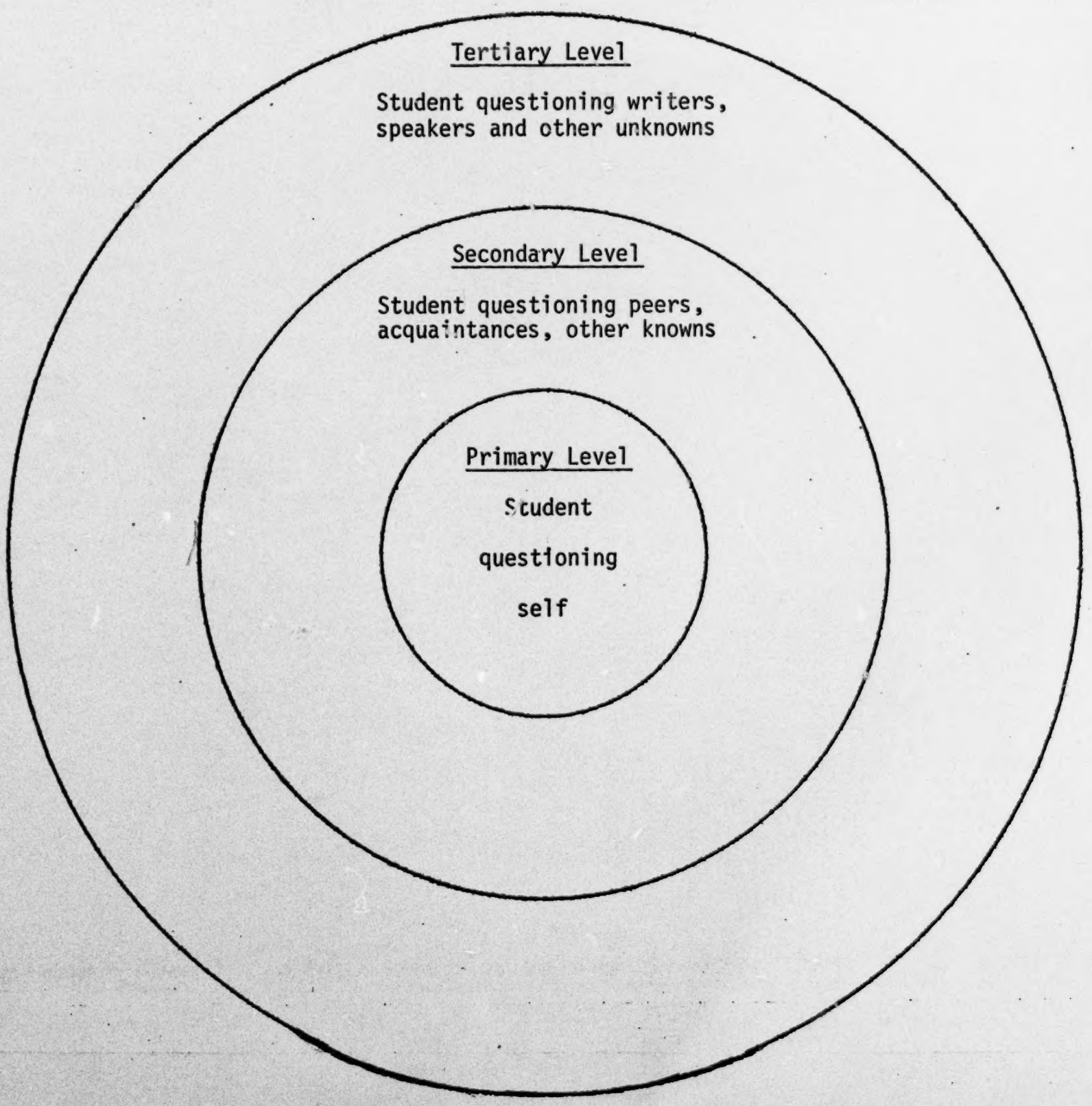
Our second job is to demonstrate for students how questioning is done, in order to derive maximum learning--much as a golf pro demonstrates body movements for effecting the best drive.

But we can't stop here. For growth to take place, according to the learning theory quoted, we must also arrange the environment so students can practice the skill of questioning. It is this third step that raises something of a problem for us as teachers. Our ultimate objective is to help students reach the point where they question writers as they read. Questioning writers is a somewhat difficult and complex concept because writers usually are persons the reader does not know, and the reader has to interact from a distance. (See model, Figure 1.) Therefore it is suggested that we begin their practice in questioning at the primary level--with the student's self. Our plan is to telescope questioning skills from self, to peers and other persons known by the student, then to writers, unknown persons whose ideas the student can know only through the printed word, whether the author wrote the words last night for this morning's newspaper or wrote them centuries ago.

The plan is to introduce the skill of questioning by asking students to apply questioning strategies to the present that revolves around themselves--

Figure 1

MODEL FOR THREE LEVELS OF RELATIONSHIP
IN WHICH STUDENT MAY PRACTICE
SKILL OF QUESTIONING



much as fledgling reporters are trained to observe, to deal in evidence, to weigh sources, to describe, to report, to interpret, to spot assumptions, to evaluate against a standard, even to make judgments, to predict, and to work with parts to see if they fit into a jigsaw of events. Some suggested categories of questions are presented in Figure 2. The labels certainly are not sacred cows. Their use is for the purpose of holding concepts still long enough for students to take a look at them. They, or other categories the reading teacher might create, are directly teachable.

A look at the other columns in Figure 2 reveals that the questions differ horizontally only because of a shift in focus--from I in Column 2 to you in Column 3 to he in Column 4.

Beginning in Column 2 the student initiates his practice by questioning himself, first using the sample questions offered and then creating his own in each of the categories. When he achieves some skill in questioning himself, he should move to the next level and practice questioning his peers, acquaintances and other known persons, again creating additional questions in each of the categories. When he acquires some facility at this level, he is ready to apply his skill by questioning writers and others outside his sphere of personal cognizance. The third level is pay dirt, both for the student and for reading teachers committed to helping students become lifelong questioners of the printed word.

Figure 2

TELESCOPING QUESTIONING FROM SELF, TO KNOWNS, TO UNKNOWNS*

CATEGORIES OF QUESTIONS	SAMPLE QUESTIONS FOR SELF	SAMPLE QUESTIONS FOR PEERS, OTHER KNOWNS	SAMPLE QUESTIONS FOR WRITERS, OTHER UNKNOWNS
DESCRIPTIVE	What is it like? What kind of a situation is it? What do I see? Smell? Etc?	What is it like? What kind of a situation is it? What do you see? Smell? Etc?	What is it like? What kind of a situation is it? What does he see? Smell? Etc?
COMPARATIVE	How are two or more things different or alike?	How are two or more things different or alike?	How are two or more things different or alike?
HISTORICAL	How did things get the way they are? What's behind what I see?	How did things get the way they are? What's behind what you see?	How did things get the way they are? What's behind what he sees?
CAUSAL	What is the reason for such a thing? Why? What is the result? Why do I believe this or that is true? Why does this make sense to me?	What is the reason for such a thing? Why? What is the result? Why do you believe this or that is true? Why does this make sense to you?	What is the reason for such a thing? Why? What is the result? Why does he believe this or that is true? Why does this make sense to him?
EXPERIMENTAL-METHODOLOGICAL	How could I test my guess? How could I find out? How could I do this? How could I explain this to someone else?	How could you test your guess? How could you find out? How could you do this? How could you explain this to someone else?	How does he test his guess? How did he find out? How did he do this? How does he explain this or that?
PREDICTIVE	What will it be like ten years from now for me?	What will it be like ten years from now for you?	What will the situation he's talking about be like ten years from now?
EVALUATIVE	What is good, better, best? What do I like about it? What do I dislike about it? What yardstick am I using?	What is good, better, best? What do you like about it? What do you dislike about it? What yardstick are you using?	What is good, better, best? What does he like about it? What does he dislike about it? What yardstick is he using?
APPLICATIVE-CREATIVE	How is this relevant to my situation? How can this be changed to fit my situation? How would I have done this?	How is this relevant to your situation? How can this be changed to fit your situation? How would you have done this?	How is this relevant to his situation? How can this be changed to fit other situations?

*This schema is an extension of the work of Dr. S. N. Cummings , Arizona State University, Tempe, Arizona